

**The Effectiveness of a Task- Based Instruction Program in
Developing the English Language Speaking Skills of Primary
Stage Pupils**

A thesis

Submitted for the master's degree in Education

(Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language)

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In education, English has become the primary language of communication. It is spoken by millions of people all over the world. Hilferty (2005) says that "when we learn a language, there are four skills that we need for complete communication. When we learn our native language, we usually learn to listen first, then to speak, then to read, and finally to write. These are called the four "language skills". In order to achieve a good command of the language, it is important that the students master all these language skills".

Of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important. People who know a language are referred to as 'speakers of that language, as if speaking included all other types of skills, and many, if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak (Thornbury, 2005).

Speaking is one of the basic skills that requires communicative competence, pronunciation (intonation, stress, and pitch), grammar, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, comprehension and gesture improving, in order to build a good communication. These elements are needed to measure the capability of the students in speaking using appropriate technique (Bailey, 2005:103).

Nobody can deny the fact that speaking is one of the important and essential skills that needs a lot of practice to communicate. People who have ability in speaking will receive the information better. As a matter of fact language is not only taught and learned, but it is used as a habit. Therefore, students of English must be able to speak English well because people identify the English mastery with their English speaking (Kayi ,2006).

In fact, Egyptian students, like others, often find some difficulties in mastering speaking skills. Al Ghussain (2001,p.90) shows that many complaints are being raised by teachers regarding students' low level in English language. Therefore, students need more opportunity to practice English and use it communicatively inside and outside the language classroom.

Modern Approaches in teaching language emphasize the integration of the pupils into pedagogic tasks based on communication and meaning as this may develop speaking skills and this also makes Task Based especially popular for developing target language fluency and student confidence. Also it is divided into three sections: the pre- task, the task cycle and the post task.

Task-based instruction (TBI) is an approach to teaching a second/foreign language that seeks to engage learners in interactionally authentic language use by having them perform a series of tasks. It aims to both enable learners (1) acquire new linguistic knowledge and (2)

proceduralize their existing knowledge. Task-based instruction attempts to involve learners in actual use of language and through its instruction, effective communication in the target language is to be realized. It stands as an offspring of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) introduced to language methodology.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) proposes the use of tasks as a central component in language classroom because they provide better contexts for activating learner acquisition processes and promoting L2 learning (Shehadeh, 2005). TBLT is thus based on a theory of language learning rather than a theory of language structure. Richards and Rodgers (2001: 228) suggest that this is because 'tasks are believed to foster processes of negotiation, modification, rephrasing, and experimentation that are at the heart of second language learning'.

The researcher proposed a procedure based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching called Task-Based language Teaching (TBLT) to enhance the speaking ability of EFL learners.

Based on the researcher's experience in teaching, it can be stated that there is weakness in primary pupils' mastery of speaking skills. EFL speaking skill within the primary classes is encountering several problems due to the following reasons:

- Teachers do not observe pupils' speech individually
- Teachers do not offer opportunities for practicing different speaking sub-skills.
- Teachers do not encourage shy pupils to participate within oral interactions
- Teachers do not give pupils sufficient feedback on their oral performance
- Pupils and teachers pay less attention to the development of speaking skill since the final evaluation is conducted through written exams.

Statement of the problem

The study problem can be identified in the fifth year primary pupils' poor mastery of the necessary English language speaking skills. Therefore, the present study tried to answer the following main question:

- **What is the effectiveness of a suggested program based on Task-Based instruction in developing fifth year primary pupils speaking skills?**

From this main question, the following sub-questions emerged:

- 1- What are the speaking skills necessary for fifth year primary pupils?
- 2- What are the features of the suggested program to develop fifth year primary pupils?

- 3- What is the effectiveness of the program in developing fifth year pupils speaking skills?

Study hypotheses:

- 1- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the speaking pre-test and post-test in overall speaking skill in favor of the post-test.
- 2- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the post- test in speaking sub skills in favor of the post-test.

Variables of the study

- **Independent variable:** the proposed program applied on the experimental group pupils.
- **Dependent variable:** this refers to the experimental group pupils' performance in the speaking post test.

Delimitations of the study

This study was delimited to:

- 1- A sample of fifth year primary pupils randomly selected from a governmental school. Those pupils had been learning English for 4 years so they were supposed to be able to perform language tasks.
- 2- Speaking skills suitable for fifth year primary pupils: pronunciation, vocabulary, accuracy, fluency and content.
- 3- A period of a school term for implementing the proposed program.

Significance of the study

It is hoped that this study will be beneficial for the following reasons:

- 1- Presenting a proposed program in the light of Task-Based instruction for teaching speaking in communicative settings which teachers can implement with their pupils.
- 2- Developing fifth year primary pupils' speaking skills by using the proposed program.
- 3- Attempting to examine the effect of using task –based teaching for developing the speaking skills of primary pupils.
- 4- Providing EFL teachers with a specific language teaching procedure which they can use in their classroom to enhance their students' achievement in English.
- 5- Providing English language teachers, supervisors and curricula designers with a list of speaking skills necessary for fifth year primary pupils to take into consideration in planning and designing speaking activities suitable for those pupils as well as in evaluating their speaking performance.
- 6- Drawing the attention of curriculum designers and teacher trainers to use task-based syllabi in teaching English language in general and in teaching speaking in particular.

- 7- Being a spring board to a number of studies for using Task-Based Instruction in teaching different skills at different school levels.
- 8- Giving language teachers and learners an opportunity to begin thinking about the new ways of teaching and learning a foreign language in an attempt to persuade them to examine modern methods and techniques.
- 9- The findings of this research could be beneficial to syllabus designers and textbook writers in putting their selection, sequencing and grading on a more useful and practical basis.

Purpose of the study

The study aimed at:

- 1- Identifying the speaking skill necessary for fifth year primary pupils.
- 2- Measuring the effectiveness of the proposed program on developing primary pupils' overall speaking as well as speaking sub-skills.

Method

Design of the study

The present study adopted the one experimental group design. The experimental group pupils were exposed to a training program based on task based instruction to develop their speaking skills. In this study, one class was selected to represent the experimental group and a pre/ post speaking test was given to the experimental group before and after the treatment.

Participants

A group of twenty- four pupils in one fifth year primary class were randomly selected from a governmental primary school in El Menofia; namely Al-Nour primary school , in the academic year 2011_2012 .

Tools of the Study

The present study made use of the main tool:

***A pre/ post speaking test to measure fifth year primary school pupils' speaking skills.**

Before designing the pre/post test, the researcher made a speaking skills checklist to determine the speaking sub skills necessary to fifth primary pupils. Also the researcher made an evaluation rating scale measuring pupils' oral performance on the pre and post speaking test.

A pre/ post speaking test was constructed and administered to the experimental group by the researcher. It was used prior to the program implementation to make sure of the level of the pupils before implementing the program; hence the progress achieved by the experimental group could be attributed to the program they had been exposed to. As a post-test, it was used to investigate the effectiveness of the proposed task- based program in developing the selected speaking skills. The final version of the pre /post

speaking test, included some pictures which contain tasks corresponding to those taught during the program.

The program: The suggested program aimed at developing the speaking skills for fifth primary pupils. The speaking skills included in the program were pronunciation, vocabulary, accuracy, fluency and content.

The program consisting of 5 units and comprising 15 speaking lessons was taught in three periods per week over a period of seven weeks. During the experimentation of the program each speaking lesson was divided into three main phases: Pre-task phase, during task phase and post- task phase.

Results related to the study hypotheses

Hypothesis one states:

"There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the speaking pre-test and post-test in overall speaking skill in favor of the post-test".

To determine the relative extent of change fostered by the implementation of the proposed program from the pre- test to the post- test for the experimental group, t- tests for paired samples were used. These t- tests aimed at comparing the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre- test and the post- test in overall speaking performance. The following table shows this statistical significance.

T- test results comparing the pre- test vs. post- test means for the experimental group in overall speaking

Test	N	M	S.D	D.F	T value	significant	Effect size
Pre-test	24	3.9312	1.28880	23	39.176	0.000	6.97 very large
Post-test	24	12.9183	1.38738	23			

Hypothesis two states:

"There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the post- test in speaking sub skills in favor of the post-test".

In order to verify the validity of this hypothesis, t- tests for paired samples were used. The t-test results proved that there were statistically significant differences between the pre- post tests mean scores of the experimental group in pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary, content as well as in fluency. In other words, the results of the t- tests proved to be statistically consistent with the above stated hypotheses. The following table shows this statistical significance.

T- test results comparing the pre- test vs. post- test means for the experimental group in speaking sub-skills

Discussion of the study results

Speaking sub –skills	Experimental Pre-test M	Pre-test S.D	Experimental Post test M	Post test S.D	D.F	T value	Significant	Effect size	Effectiveness
Pronunciation	.885	.36388	2.4150	.40790	23	22.134	.000	4.20 large	1.23
Vocabulary	1.1783	.27778	2.7613	.28768	23	24.589	.000	5.70 large	1.40
Accuracy	.5396	.41490	2.5525	.36295	23	18.798	.000	4.85 large	1.49
Fluency	.6083	.38903	2.3725	.37035	23	16.817	.000	4.53 large	1.33
Content	.7613	.28768	2.8171	.26133	23	26.430	.000	7.15 large	1.60

The study results are discussed in terms of the two independent variables: pupils' performance in the speaking skill as a whole and pupils' performance in speaking sub -skills.

Results of the study show that the experimental group pupils achieved significant progress in their overall performance in speaking and sub skills after the treatment as compared to their performance before the treatment. This positive finding indicates the effectiveness of the teaching program designed in the light of task -based instruction in enhancing the experimental group's overall speaking performance. This might be attributed to several factors:

- The learning tasks which were presented to the pupils throughout fifteen lessons proved to be effective. Teaching speaking through task –based instruction provided pupils with meaningful practice of the target language. Pupils were trained to deal with tasks of different levels of difficulty which enhanced their confidence to speak spontaneously and fluently as shown in their post test performance.
- Performing the task in pairs and groups helped pupils to practice discussion in a safe environment. It enabled weak pupils to benefit from good pupils and thus enhanced their learning, most of the pupils reported that they enjoyed performing the tasks. After the end of the program implementation, they asked for more tasks.

Recommendations of the study

In the light of the significant results of the present study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1- More attention should be given to the development of fifth year primary stage pupils' speaking skills in EFL classes.
- 2- Teachers should concentrate on the real-life situations tasks which encourage learners to speak English inside the classroom freely.
- 3- Teachers also should give more focus on pair-work and group work activities that allow learners to interact and communicate with each other naturally and freely.
- 4- Pupils should be encouraged to be more responsible for their learning through informing them about the significance of each speaking skill. Hence they will be more motivated and enthusiastic to master these skills.
- 5- Pupils should be encouraged and motivated to communicate and interact freely with their peers to practice activities.
- 6- Task based instruction should be incorporated in teaching speaking in different educational stages.
- 7-Providing teachers of English with appropriate resources that enable them to use task based activities in their teaching effectively is recommended.

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